



Connecticut Veterans & Military Coalition

360 Broad Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06105

CTMilitaryCoalition@gmail.com

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Testimony in Favor of Raised Bills 1069 and 6480

Good Morning Sen. Maynard, Representative Hennessy and members of the Select Committee on Veterans Affairs. I am Debbi Newton, Legislative Liaison for the newly formed Connecticut Veterans & Military Coalition. The CVMC is an organization of about 20 groups such as the National Guard Association of Connecticut, the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, The Military Order of the Purple Heart, The Marine Corps Association, Association of the US Army and ESGR to name but a few. We held our first meeting in December and have organized to provide one voice here at the State Legislature as well as on Capitol Hill in Washington. We represent more than 400,000 Veterans, Retirees, Servicemembers and their families and survivors.

I apologize for not being in front of you today, but happily the Connecticut Army National Guard has a unit returning home from deployment today and my job has me there.

I speak in favor of two of the bills before you.

Raised Bill 1069, ACC Death Certificate Fee Waivers for Veterans will allow the family members of a deceased Veteran to receive one certified copy of that Veteran's death certificate free of any fees. That death certificate is many times the key to unlocking numerous life insurance policies and other financial benefits for survivors of that Veteran. Having quick access to those benefits without having to pay for the item that makes them available will do much in assisting the survivors to get the benefits they need and deserve and are entitled to.

Raised Bill 6480, ACC the Identification of Connecticut Veterans Eligible for Benefits from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs is a much needed piece of legislation. I know you will hear from many today who will speak on the need for it and who will be able to give you all kinds of reasons why this is needed. I want to tell you a personal story.

Both of my parents served on Active Duty in the United States Army in the 50s, Dad for two years, Mom for three. Neither of them served during time of war. Neither of them knew they were eligible for VA benefits. My dad was a public school teacher and assistant principal and, as such, had good medical insurance. When he retired, he kept up his insurance and eventually became eligible for Medicare benefits. Of course, his benefits were not as great once he retired, but they did alright.

Eventually both he and my mom developed medical issues: dad with Lyme Disease and high cholesterol and mom with leukemia and severe heart and lung issues. Someone in the civilian medical community who was helping my parents look at ways to pay for their treatment and medications asked if they had ever served in the military. They both said yes and doors throughout the VA system were magically opened for them. They had gone years not knowing they had VA eligibility. They had gone years paying large, out of pocket costs for medical care and treatment. The VA had never told them they had benefits. It was a civilian in the medical field who had worked with veterans before and who knew what questions to ask who opened those doors for them.

This past July, my mother's health deteriorated. She was admitted and discharged from a local civilian hospital twice. The third time she was taken to the ER, her VA doctor said no more. She was taken to the VA in West Haven where she was given only days to live. It was a devastating time for our family. But mom did not give up and because of her attitude, neither did the doctors and medical staff at the VA. The civilian hospital, probably more concerned with pushing patients through, didn't take the time with her she needed and deserved as a human being.

The VA did. They brought in all kinds of specialists from Yale. They poured over her records as a team. They discovered meds that were working against each other, meds that negated other meds she was taking and meds that were causing some of her health issues. They saved her life and she is still with us today because of their dedication, caring and hard work. She is by no means 100% well and never will be. But she saw her youngest son married in January.

Would that have happened had she not found out from someone in the civilian medical community that she was eligible for VA benefits? Maybe not. We may never know. But how many other Veterans are out there that do not know they are eligible for routine and life-saving care?

We need to find a way to make sure every Veteran knows what their benefits are, medical, educational, financial. They have given so much and asked so little in return. How can we deny them? And yet we do.

This bill is the vehicle that may be able to reach our Veterans. We urge you to pass it for all their sakes.

I thank you for your time and for what you do for the Veterans, Military Members and Retirees of Connecticut and their families. This concludes my testimony and I am available at the phone number or email address below for any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Debbi Newton
Legislative Liaison CVMC
860-913-5010
ctmilitarycoalition@gmail.com